

CBD drug trends 2023 snapshot

Drug overdoses, ambulance callouts and drug deaths in Melbourne's CBD are on the rise following COVID.

This CBD drug trends snapshot reveals the drug crisis in our city, and the cost to individuals and our community.

The data shows there is a need for more harm reduction services in the city, including a dire need for a supervised injecting room that saves lives and connects people to support and treatment.

The snapshot has been compiled by Victoria's peak body for alcohol and drug services and organisations that deliver alcohol and drug support services in Melbourne's CBD.



Ambulance callouts are on the rise.

390
Heroin-related ambulance callouts

The number of heroin-related ambulance callouts in the City of Melbourne in 2021-22.

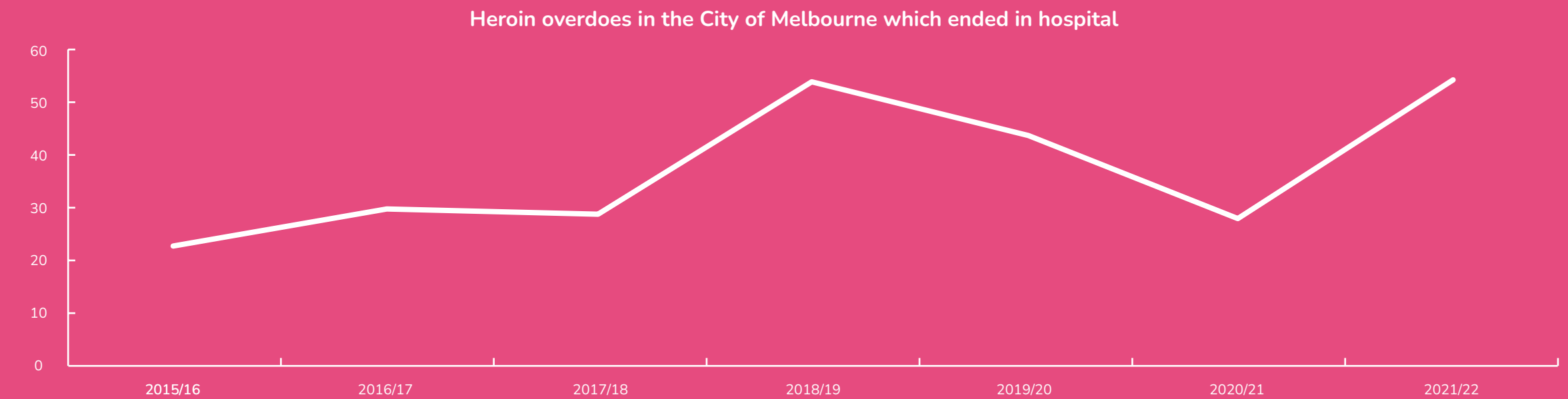
Source: Turning Point, Ambulance Victoria attendances

28%
Increase in callouts

The increase in heroin-related ambulance callouts in the City of Melbourne between 2020 FY and 2021 FY.

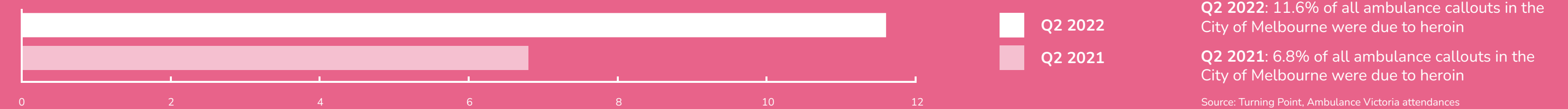
2022 FY data not yet publicly available.
Source: Turning Point, Ambulance Victoria attendances

The number of people ending up in hospital due to heroin overdose have exceeded pre-COVID-19 levels.



Source: Turning Point, Ambulance Victoria attendances

Heroin use in the CBD is an increasing burden on ambulance and emergency services.

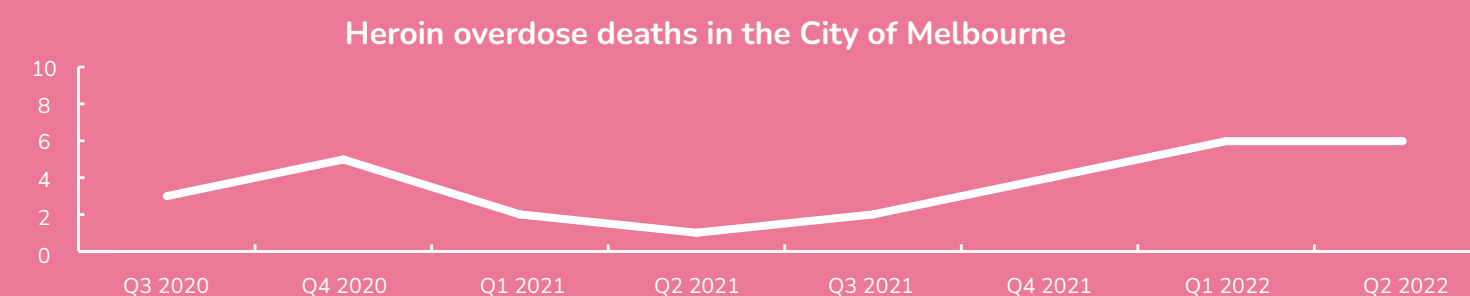


Overdose deaths in the CBD

29
Overdose deaths

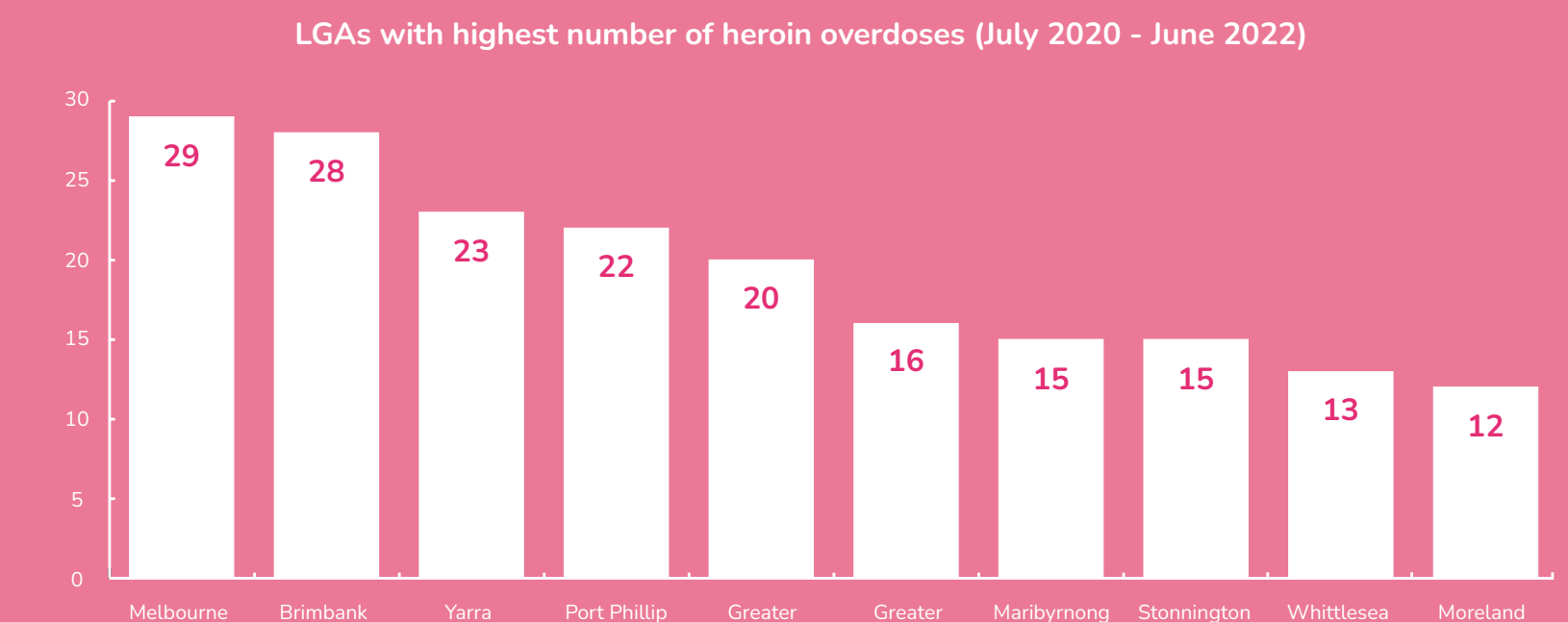
The number of people who died of heroin overdose in the City of Melbourne in the 2 years to June 2022.

Source: Coroner's Court of Victoria Drug overdose deaths report



Source: Coroner's Court of Victoria

City of Melbourne has the highest number of heroin deaths of any Victorian LGA.



Source: Coroner's Court of Victoria

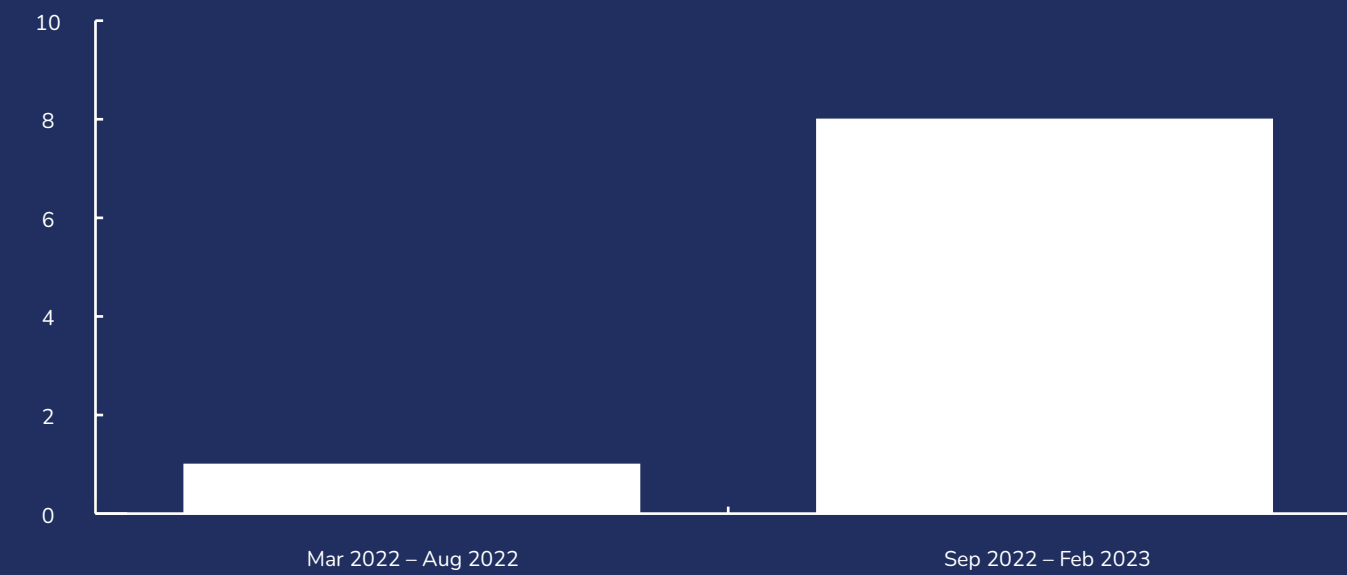
↑ **3x**
The number of client contacts

Source: cohealth City Street Health team 2022 – 2023

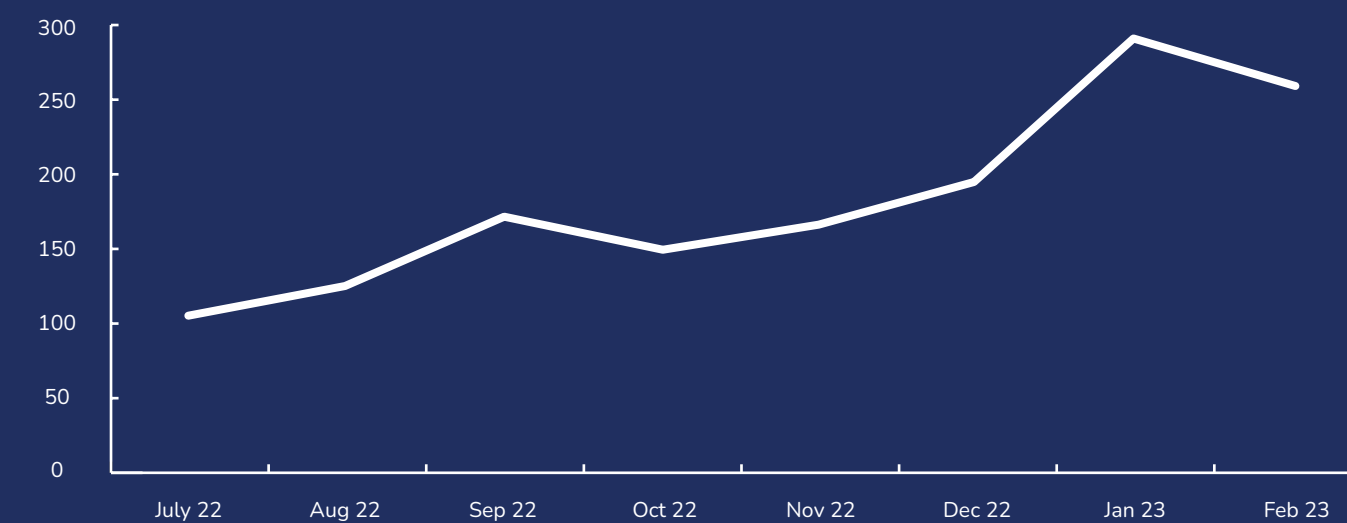
cohealth's City Street Health team provides 7 day/ week outreach support for people who are drug and alcohol dependent who live on the streets in the CBD.

In the past 6 months they have seen a sharp increase in the number of CBD overdoses, as people return to the city, and heroin becomes more accessible, and stronger.

Number of CBD overdoses (non-fatal) responded to by cohealth's outreach team between March 2022 and February 2023



Number of client contacts with cohealth's CBD Outreach team



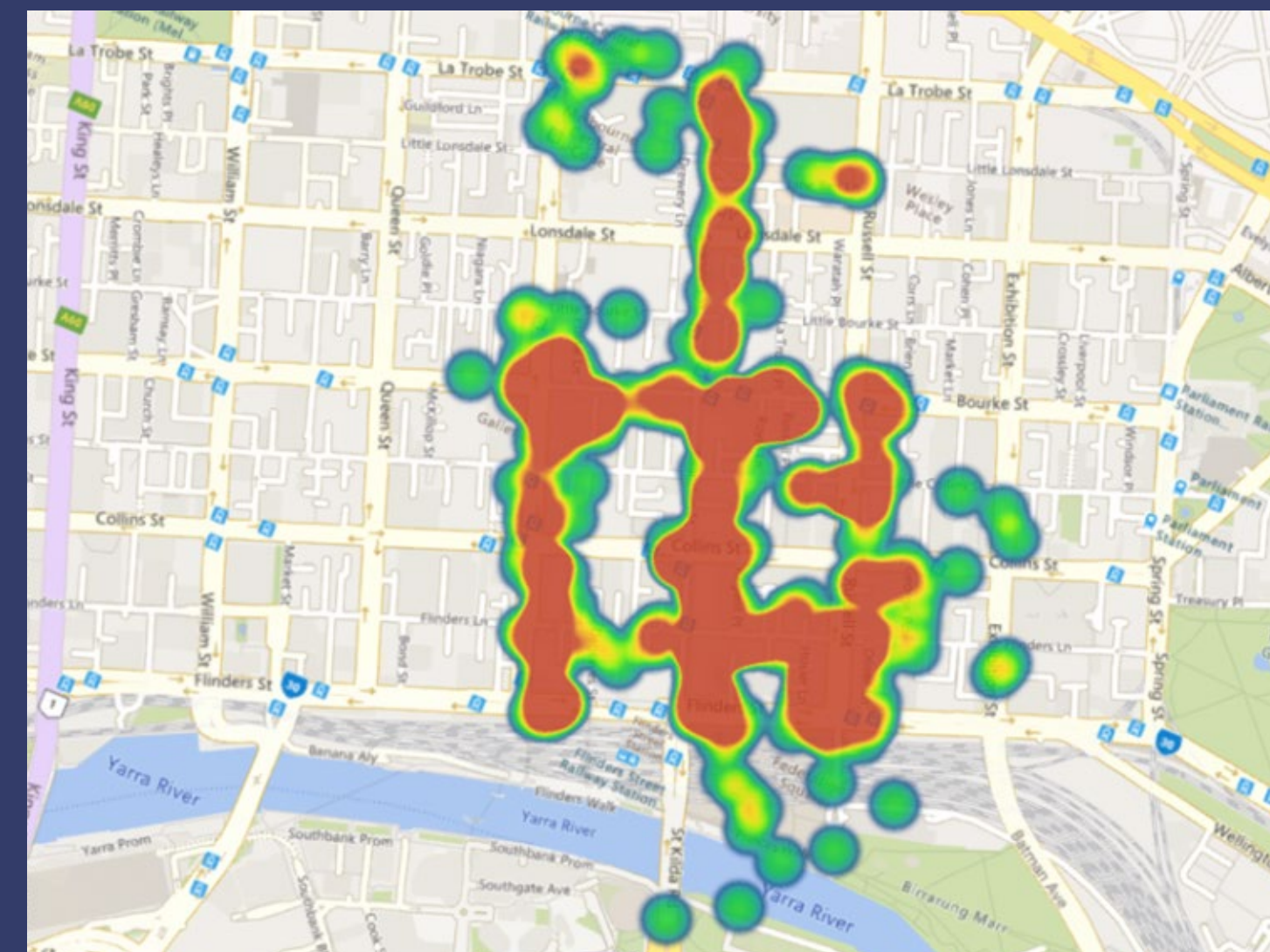
💉 **148,278**
Clean syringes dispensed

Dispensed by Living Room workers in the City of Melbourne in the 12 months to February 2023.

The Living Room, a primary health service and drop in centre for people who are, or at risk of experiencing homelessness, responds to requests for clean injecting equipment in the City of Melbourne.

This map reflects locations where people collected unused syringes (and return used syringes). Patterns of syringe distribution is an indicator of locations of drug use.

In the absence of a supervised injecting room people who collect syringes and buy drugs in the CBD will inject in the nearby streets and laneways.



🗣️ **10**
CBD overdose responses

The number of overdoses that CBD alcohol and drug service, Youth Projects, responded to in the 6 months to January 2023.

“Our clients, our friends are dying. Our needle syringe and overdose response programs have never been busier. We have the wrap around support available here and now, what we need is a safe injecting environment. This will save lives.”

Ben Vasiliou, CEO, Youth Projects

Katrina Korver's 38 year old son, Danial, died of a heroin overdose in a CBD laneway in June 2022.

He had scored the drugs two blocks away. Danial had been a regular user of the North Richmond Medically Supervised Injecting Room, where he had been receiving depot buprenorphine in the previous months.

“Travelling to North Richmond from the CBD was not an option that day.

As he told me once, ‘Mum, once you have those drugs in your hands, every receptor in your body is screaming out for you to use them and to get some relief.’

I know that if there had been a supervised injecting room in the CBD, our son would still be alive.”

Danial did not want to die. He had a 13-year-old son. He had recently moved into accommodation through the Homelessness to a Home program and found some stability. He had a trade and was making plans to get his small business back up and running. He was funny, kind, and well-liked.”

Katrina Korver, mother

Val first encountered cohealth in January 2018. He was sleeping rough in the CBD and using heroin daily. He had undiagnosed HIV and Complex PTSD related to childhood trauma.

“Without a doubt I was at my lowest point in my life and feeling totally hopeless and ‘NO WAY OUT. I had turned to self-harming, anti-social and addictive behaviours just to cope and escape my reality.”

“Through cohealth I’ve had a team of professionals wrap around me to support my recovery, including GPs, addiction specialists, psychologists, counsellors and support workers.

At my lowest point, I was treated with dignity and respect.

I have now reached 5 years of sobriety and have returned to full time study, have accommodation, am volunteering and I have plans for the future. Instead of hopelessness I feel hope.”

Val Fernandez, cohealth client

“Nine of the people who overdosed in the CBD in recent times are friends of mine. They’re people I’ve developed a connection with. As a city if we harden our hearts towards those particular people, then it will come back to haunt us in years to come.”

Major Brendan Nottle, Salvation Army 614 Project

“The reality is that once people have sourced the substance, they are likely to use it almost immediately. Asking that people delay using their drugs is like giving a glass of water to someone walking through a desert but asking them to keep walking 5kms before they have a drink.”

“There is a dire need in the city for an injecting room. We need to keep people alive, and we want to provide a gateway out of that lifestyle. Injecting rooms meet people where they’re at and provide a pathway to recovery.”

Dr Paul MacCartney, addiction medicine specialist & GP

“People are often found sleeping on our church steps for shelter. When we approach them to talk, we pray they are just asleep and not unconscious because of an overdose, or worse, that they have died. We’re not a health service, we can’t directly help them, but we can advocate for their care and their dignity.”

Rev. Dr. Margaret Mayman, St Michael’s Uniting Church